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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN REACTION TO THE 2006 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The MFA spokesman and leading Duma members criticized the 2006 Human Rights Report as biased, hypocritical, and needlessly confrontational. However, Ella Pamfilova, Chairwoman of the President's Human Rights Council, surprised observers by telling the media she agreed with the majority of the findings -- and thanked the Department for the report. End summary.

Accusations of Hypocrisy and Double Standards

¶2. (U) Foreign Ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin on March 9 alleged the report contained deliberate errors, relied upon biased sources, and used outdated information. He also slammed the report as politically motivated and needlessly confrontational in tone. Kamynin said the United States was hypocritical because "the United States itself, under various pretexts, limits democratic freedoms, interferes with the personal life of its citizens, engages in de facto censorship of the media, and sends minors to the electric chair."

¶3. (U) Duma International Affairs Committee Chairman Konstantin Kosachev told the press March 8 that while he agreed with some points (notably, corruption in the security organs), the overall report was flawed. Kosachev and Committee Deputy Chairman Vasiliy Likachev accused the U.S. of double standards, citing Guantanamo prisoners, secret CIA prisons in Europe, and Iraq.

¶4. (U) On March 13, Nataliya Narosnika, the head of the Duma Commission to Investigate the Observance of Human Rights in Foreign Countries, accused the U.S. of hypocrisy. "This report causes great indignation around the world, because the United States itself does not have clean hands. In the United States, there are miscarriages of justice, beatings in prison, discrimination against women, and violations of the freedom of speech." She also accused the United States of ignoring similar conditions in friendly countries.

Acknowledgment of Human Rights Problems

¶5. (U) Narosnika then moved beyond criticism of the United States to Russia's human rights problems. "We do not need to respond to every criticism, but we do have a stake in looking at our problems and seeing our sins and imperfections removed." Without bowing to Western demands, she said, Russia can still use the Western model "at a theoretical level" to examine Russia's conditions and shortcomings and correct those things that it is possible to correct. Narosnika implied that most of Russia's human rights problems spring from "a social-cultural context and our lack of

political habits and traditions."

¶6. (U) Ella Pamfilova, the Chairwoman of the President's Council on Human Rights, told the media that "without a doubt, we have serious problems. I am in agreement with the majority of the findings in the report. Overall, I thank Condoleezza Rice's department for its steadfast attention to the situation in our country. The most important thing right now is to learn to avert human rights violations."

¶7. (SBU) Alexander Petrov, Deputy Director of Human Rights Watch in Russia, told us that he was surprised and encouraged by Pamfilova's statement. He had expected that, as usual, the government would simply criticize and dismiss the report.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) We expected a generally negative official reaction -- the GOR traditionally bristles when the report is published. For that reason, Ella Pamfilova's positive public assessment was a welcome surprise.

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